

Chester A. Gipson, D.V.M., Deputy Administrator, USDA-APHIS-AC

4700 River Road, Unit 84

Riverdale, MD 20737-1234

ph: 301-734-7833; fax: 301-734-4978, 301-734-4993

email: ace@aphis.usda.gov, Chester.A.Gipson@usda.gov

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, U.S. Department of Agriculture

1400 Independence Ave., S.W.

Washington, DC 20250

Secretary of Agriculture: AgSec@usda.gov

Dear Dr. Gipson and Secretary Vilsack:

You are likely aware of the 3/7/09 incident involving circus elephants in Indianapolis, Indiana. One elephant head butted another into a scaffold as people waited in line for elephant rides with the Murat Shrine Circus. The metal structure caved in. An adult and 12 children were injured.

It could have been worse. From 1990 to 2008, captive elephant incidents in the U.S. have led to 13 human deaths and 120 human injuries.

Shockingly, the Murat Shrine Circus resumed elephant rides at intermission. The elephants under Will Davenport's direction for the Murat Shrine Circus included Tina, Jewel and Queenie. The three have shown aggression in the past. Moreover, the USDA has continually cited the Davenport family for inhumane treatment and lack of veterinary care to elephants.

When will the USDA finally seize Tina, Jewel and Queenie to retire them to a sanctuary? Please facilitate their reprieve from chains and bullhooks — and protect the public from captive elephant rampages. In addition, I urge you to revoke Will Davenport's USDA exhibitor license.

Davenport was ordered out the City of Los Angeles in April 2008, due to his history of animal cruelty. In 2007 Tina and Jewel were so underweight, the USDA took them off the travel circuit. Presently, the USDA is investigating the Davenport family for violations of the Animal Welfare Act. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is looking into their alleged breach of the federal Endangered Species Act.

Tina, Jewel and Queenie have suffered extreme physical and psychological stress while leased from circus to circus over the years. In 2007, Tina and Jewel were photographed on a nearly shade-less cement slab engulfed in debris. Underweight and without access to water, they rocked back and forth. The elephants' ongoing interaction with the public is both dangerous and irresponsible.

I strongly encourage the USDA to clamp down on alleged animal abusers like Will Davenport. Please also remove Tina, Jewel and Queenie from travel, shows or rides. After suspect Tuberculosis test results on Jewel and numerous wounds congruent with ankus abuse — it is well past time to authorize their release to an accredited sanctuary.

I sincerely hope this administration breathes new life into the "animal care" arm of USDA-APHIS.

Thank you,